

UNITED STATES PATENT APPLICATION

Title:

FORWARDING TELEPHONE DATA VIA EMAIL

Inventors:

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~~This application is related to application S/N 09/421,971 entitled "Caller ID Lookup" is filed contemporaneously with this application by the same inventor and assigned to the entity.~~

The present invention relates generally to voicemail and email, and more particularly to an apparatus and method for forwarding voicemail as email or as a web page.

Caller ID allows suitably equipped telephone equipment to determine and display, at the party's premises, the identity of the person placing a phone call, or, more specifically, the phone number of the calling phone and usually an identification of its owner.

Speed dial and other local storage techniques are known, which allow a telephone user to store names and numbers of other people, typically those called frequently.

Some telephones have the ability to, when receiving a phone call, use the numeric caller ID information to search through such speed dial memory, such that what is displayed is the locally stored name of the caller rather than the name which the telephone company may provide as part of the caller ID info itself. For example, one's telephone may display "Dad" when he calls, rather than the name "Clapper, Robert" under which the calling telephone is subscribed to the phone company.

Computer-based voicemail systems and answering machines are known. They digitize incoming voicemail messages and store them, typically on a hard drive or in memory, for later pickup by the phone's owner.

Various audio encoding techniques are known. For example, digital waveforms may be encoded in .WAV files. Other encoding techniques are known, which use less storage space than files, such as MP3 technologies.

Telephone and other information lookup sites are known on the internet. For example, anywho.com provides the ability to not only look up a telephone number for a known name, but also the ability to do a “reverse phone book lookup” which provides the name associated with a telephone number. Other, similar services enable the lookup of street address, email address, and so forth, based on known names or other data.

Brief Description of the Drawings

The invention will be understood more fully from the detailed description given below and from the accompanying drawings of embodiments of the invention which, however, should not be taken to limit the invention to the specific embodiments described, but are for explanation and understanding only.

FIG. 1 shows a block diagram of one embodiment of an apparatus constructed according to the principles of this invention, and an exemplary system in which it may be used.

FIG. 2 shows one exemplary embodiment of a method of operation of the invention.

FIG. 3 shows another exemplary embodiment of a method of operation of the invention.

FIG. 4 shows one exemplary embodiment of a user interface for the apparatus.

Detailed Description

FIG. 1 illustrates a system 5 and one embodiment of an apparatus 10 which may be utilized in the system. The apparatus may be implemented as an appliance, in one embodiment of this invention. The system includes a phone system 12 such as the public switched telephone system, or a PBX, or a packet switched network, or any other suitable telephone system. At least one telephone ("remote phone") 14, and typically a very large number of such telephones, are connected to the telephone system. The system further includes a data network 16 ("internet") such as the internet, a local area network, a wide area network, or other such infrastructure, to which may be coupled one or many data service providers 18, generally indicated herein as "remote websites", and one or many remote email/web clients 20 which are capable of receiving email and web pages over the internet. In some instantiations, the phone system and the data system (internet) may be the same system.

The appliance of the invention is also coupled to these networks. The appliance includes a telephone mechanism 30 ("local phone") for connecting to the telephone system. It includes a caller ID mechanism 32 for receiving caller ID information from the telephone system. It includes an internet client 34 for connecting to the internet or other such data system. It also includes a search director 36 for conducting searches of the remote websites. The appliance includes an email program 38 for sending email via the internet client to one or more of the remote email clients. The appliance includes a data presentation composer 40, such as an html (hypertext markup language) composer for preparing html pages for local display or for serving to remote clients. The appliance further includes

1 memory 42 or storage, such as a hard disk, recordable compact disc (CD-R), rewriteable compact
2 disc (CD-RW), semiconductor memory, or other suitable storage mechanism for storing data. It also
3 includes a processor 44 for performing logic and data manipulation operations. The appliance may
4 include an audio encoder 46 such as an MP3 encoder, and an audio decoder or player 48 such as an
5 MP3 player. Finally, the appliance includes a presentation interface 50, such as a video display
6 screen and an audio speaker.

7 These components may be implemented in a wide variety of ways, in hardware, software,
8 combinations thereof, and in digital or analog form. For purposes of illustration, they will be
9 described as being implemented in a personal computer (PC) like appliance such as the Intel®
10 Dot.Station™ appliance. The particular interconnect mechanism between them will be well within
11 the abilities of the skilled reader, armed with this disclosure, and need not be discussed further here.
12 The reader will understand that the components could alternatively be partitioned differently than in
13 the illustrated example; for example, the email program, search director, and html composer could be
14 a single piece of software. The reader will further understand that various specifics detailed above
15 are only by way of illustration, and are not necessarily required in order to practice the invention; for
16 example, an audio encoding technique other than MP3 could be employed.

17 FIG. 2 illustrates one embodiment of a method of operation of the appliance. The appliance
18 receives (60) a phone call from a sender, stores (62) the caller ID information which it receives with
19 the phone call from the phone system, and answers (64) the call. The sender may be a person or a
20 machine, and the identifying information such as caller ID may identify the person and/or the
21 machine. In some embodiments, the appliance may include a telephone handset, allowing the user to
22 answer the call; in such embodiments, this may abort the method of this invention. In some
23 embodiments, the invention may be practiced in conjunction with communications other than
24 conventional telephone calls. By way of example and not limitation, such communications might
25 include a pager message, an instant message, a private radio call such as over the Motorola network,
26 a voice-over-IP call, a wireless point-to-point contact, and so forth.

27 The appliance plays (66) an outgoing greeting announcement from the storage, typically
28 something like “hi, I’m not here, so leave me a message”. If the caller does not hang up, but begins
29 speaking, the appliance records (68) the incoming voicemail message to the storage. In some
30 embodiments, it may first record the message as a .WAV file, and then encode (70) it as an MP3 file.
31 In some embodiments, the encoding may be performed on the fly, without an intermediate file being

1 stored. In some embodiments, both versions of the voicemail message file may be kept; for example,
2 the .WAV file may be used for local answering machine playback, while the MP3 file may be used
3 for email and web purposes, explained below.

4 After receiving the caller ID information, either while the caller is leaving the voicemail
5 message or after he or she hangs up, the appliance connects (72) to the internet using its internet
6 client, and searches (74) one or more remote websites for other information correlated with the caller
7 ID information, using its search director. It may search a predetermined list of websites, or it may
8 utilize a portal, a spider, or other techniques. Upon receiving the correlated information, such as the
9 caller's address, email address, and so forth, the appliance stores (76) this information to the storage.
10 In some embodiments, subsequent calls from this same caller ID will not cause the internet search, as
11 the correlated information will already be in the local storage. In some embodiments, there may be a
12 refresh period, such that if the stored information was retrieved more than e.g. one week prior, it is
13 re-fetched from the internet, in case some of the correlated information has changed or more
14 correlated information is now available.

15 In some embodiments, the appliance may then compose and send (78) an email to one or
16 more predetermined email addresses, with the voicemail audio file included e.g. as an attached file.
17 In some such embodiments, the user may have specified a single email address to which all
18 voicemails should be forwarded; such embodiments would be useful, for example, if the user is
19 going to his summer home (where he has an email connection but no phone) for a week but needs to
20 continue receiving his voicemail.


21 FIG. 3 illustrates one embodiment of a method of further operation of the appliance. The
22 appliance receives (80) a request from one of the remote email/web clients or perhaps directly at the
23 local internet client's browser, such as an http request for a web page to contain the requester's
24 voicemail. In some embodiments, the appliance may authenticate the requester, for security
25 purposes. The appliance's html composer constructs (82) a web page, such as in the form of a table,
26 using data which has been placed in storage (in accordance with the method of FIG. 2) and the
27 internet client responds (84) to the http request by sending the web page which the html constructor
28 has built (either to the remote email/web client or to the local presentation interface). In some
29 embodiments, this may be performed using a secure transport mechanism such as https.


30 In some embodiments, the web page constructed may include one or more hyperlinks, and the
31 remote user may make further requests via those hyperlinks. If he or she does, the appliance receives

1 (86) the request such as in the form of a further http request, retrieves (88) additional data from the
2 storage, and replies (90) to the request by forwarding the hyperlinked data. One such hyperlinked
3 data item may be the voicemail message itself. If (92) the request for the hyperlinked voicemail
4 message is made locally, at the appliance, the appliance's MP3 player plays (94) the voicemail on the
5 local speaker. Otherwise, if the request is from a remote email/web client, the appliance's internet
6 client forwards (96) the MP3 file to the remote device, where it will be decoded and played for the
7 remote user. Alternatively, if the request is from a remote device that does not have the ability to
8 decode or playback the file, the appliance may decode it locally and output e.g. an analog waveform
9 or a .WAV file to the remote device.

10 The reader will appreciate that these are but exemplary implementations of such methods,
11 and that various changes may be made to the particulars and ordering of the methods, within the
12 scope of this invention. The reader will further appreciate that additions may be made, such as
13 deleting old or listened-to voicemail files.

14 FIG. 4 illustrates one exemplary embodiment of a voicemail interface web page which may
15 be constructed by the html composer. The information is shown as being presented in tabular format,
16 but other formats are certainly possible and within the scope of this invention. The voicemail
17 interface web page may include entries for each of the voicemail messages received, or perhaps for a
18 subset, as in the case where there are too many to show on a single page. The presented data might
19 include, for example, the date and time when the call was received, the phone number from which
20 the call was placed (unless caller ID information was not made available for that call), the name of
21 the caller if the internet or local lookup was successful, and other such information such as street
22 address, email address, uniform resource locator (URL) of the caller's website, and so forth.

23 The voicemail message itself is made available through this interface page. One method of
24 making it available is to include a hyperlinked icon. In the example shown, the symbol “”

25 indicates a new voicemail message, and the symbol “” indicates a voicemail message to which
26 the user has previously listened. Alternatively, the voicemail message could be made available as a
27 hyperlinked URL, or as an Active-X control, or through any other suitable mechanism.

28 Additionally, the voicemail interface web page may include additional items, such as control
29 buttons for reviewing previously deleted messages which may be held in a “recycle bin” in the
30 storage, or for freeing up storage space by emptying the recycle bin, or for administering passwords

1 or other controls. It may include further controls (not shown), such as for paging to the next subset of
2 voicemail messages, changing the default email-to address, changing the MP3 recording
3 datarate/quality setting, setting passwords on individual files, hiding all calls from a particular caller
4 ID unless an administrator password is provided, automatically deleting (or not recording) voicemail
5 from a specified list of callers, and so forth.

6 The reader should appreciate that drawings showing methods, and the written descriptions
7 thereof, should also be understood to illustrate machine-accessible media having recorded, encoded,
8 or otherwise embodied therein instructions, functions, routines, control codes, firmware, software, or
9 the like, which, when accessed, read, executed, loaded into, or otherwise utilized by a machine, will
10 cause the machine to perform the illustrated methods. Such media may include, by way of illustration
11 only and not limitation: magnetic, optical, magneto-optical, or other storage mechanisms, fixed or
12 removable discs, drives, tapes, semiconductor memories, organic memories, CD-ROM, CD-R,
13 CD-RW, DVD-ROM, DVD-R, DVD-RW, Zip, floppy, cassette, reel-to-reel, or the like. They may
14 alternatively include down-the-wire, broadcast, or other delivery mechanisms such as Internet, local
15 area network, wide area network, wireless, cellular, cable, laser, satellite, microwave, or other
16 suitable carrier means, over which the instructions etc. may be delivered in the form of packets,
17 serial data, parallel data, or other suitable format. The machine may include, by way of illustration
18 only and not limitation: microprocessor, embedded controller, PLA, PAL, FPGA, ASIC, computer,
19 smart card, networking equipment, or any other machine, apparatus, system, or the like which is
20 adapted to perform functionality defined by such instructions or the like. Such drawings, written
21 descriptions, and corresponding claims may variously be understood as representing the instructions
22 etc. taken alone, the instructions etc. as organized in their particular packet/serial/parallel/etc. form,
23 and/or the instructions etc. together with their storage or carrier media. The reader will further
24 appreciate that such instructions etc. may be recorded or carried in compressed, encrypted, or
25 otherwise encoded format without departing from the scope of this patent, even if the instructions
26 etc. must be decrypted, decompressed, compiled, interpreted, or otherwise manipulated prior to their
27 execution or other utilization by the machine.

28 Reference in the specification to "an embodiment," "one embodiment," "some
29 embodiments," or "other embodiments" means that a particular feature, structure, or characteristic
30 described in connection with the embodiments is included in at least some embodiments, but not

1 necessarily all embodiments, of the invention. The various appearances "an embodiment," "one
2 embodiment," or "some embodiments" are not necessarily all referring to the same embodiments.

3 If the specification states a component, feature, structure, or characteristic "may", "might", or
4 "could" be included, that particular component, feature, structure, or characteristic is not required to
5 be included. If the specification or claim refers to "a" or "an" element, that does not mean there is
6 only one of the element. If the specification or claims refer to "an additional" element, that does not
7 preclude there being more than one of the additional element.

8 Those skilled in the art having the benefit of this disclosure will appreciate that many other
9 variations from the foregoing description and drawings may be made within the scope of the present
10 invention. Indeed, the invention is not limited to the details described above. Rather, it is the
11 following claims including any amendments thereto that define the scope of the invention.
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